



**BLACK LAW STUDENTS
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA**

**L'ASSOCIATION DES ETUDIANTS NOIRS
EN DROIT DU CANADA**

BLSA Canada's Report on the First Meeting of Ontario's Anti-Racism Directorate

On Thursday, July 14, 2016 the Ontario Government's Anti-Racism Directorate held its first community meeting. Some key government representatives that were in attendance were Minister Michael Coteau, Premiere Kathleen Wynne, and Mayor John Tory. The directorate is headed by Minister Coteau who holds the title Minister of Children and Youth Services and Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism. Several of BLSAC's executives were also in attendance to synthesize the discussion, the spoken goals of the directorate, and the solutions proposed to combat racism. This report will provide an overview of all of the above. BLSAC is available to provide further details and clarification as to what transpired should you desire more information.

The Mandate of the Directorate

The written mandate of the directorate is as follows:¹

- Decrease systemic racism in institutions governed or regulated by the Ontario government
- Increase awareness and understanding of systemic racism among the public
- Promote fair practices and policies that lead to racial equity
- Collaborate with the community, business organizations, government and the Ontario Human Rights Commission

The statements offered by Minister Coteau and Premiere Wynne at the meeting reflected the directorate's written mandate. Both leaders placed an emphasis on community collaboration and allowing community identified issues and solutions to translate into governmental decisions. In all, the directorate's mandate seems to be centered on the principle of using collaboration to achieve its anti-racism goals. This collaboration is not intended to be limited to the community but extends to businesses and government bodies as well.

Issues Highlighted in the Discussion

Many in attendance voiced their concern that the government does not truly appear to be committed to solving the issue of racism in the province of Ontario. Several community members spoke of the government's need to shift away from the obvious recognition that racism is real to the determination that racism is a priority. For example, Minister Coteau shared that the directorate's budget is \$5,000,000 – the size of the budget was not well received. It was seen by some as inadequate to achieve the mandate of the directorate and it further qualified for some that racism in Ontario is not being treated as a priority. To this concern, Minister Coteau assured those in attendance that the directorate was established to work with other government ministries and bodies. Their budgets will also contribute to the directorates initiatives.

Several community members also took issue with Mayor Tory's treatment of racism and neglect of Black Lives Matter's protestors. It was repeatedly communicated that the Toronto community does not feel as though Mayor Tory is doing enough to address the issues plaguing the city's black population. Mayor Tory's neglect of Black Lives Matter protestors as they protested in the cold for 15 consecutive days was seen by many as indicative that he is not committed to anti-racism. However, when asked to admit that he erred and ought to have been there to speak to

¹ For more information on the mandate, visit <https://www.ontario.ca/page/anti-racism-directorate#section-1>

the protestors, Mayor Tory did so and apologized for his absence. He also shared that the city of Toronto will be hosting its own consultations and that he will speak to Black Lives Matter directly.

The community also expressed its displeasure with the serious underrepresentation of black individuals at the upper ends of organizational charts and government decision-making chains. It was stated that covert racism in the private sector is real and pervasive. The belief was expressed that black people are often hired as tokens and are the first to be let go during restructuring. Some other concerns raised by the community were:

- That officers who abuse their power to shoot and harass citizens are not held accountable for their actions.
- That the government's decision to host the meeting in Regent Park post-gentrification is ironic and demonstrates its lack of sensitivity to issues of race.
- That Black Lives Matter is unfairly criticized when they are the reason the black community is no longer being ignored and meetings like this are happening.
- That the prison system and education systems are broken and both perpetuate cycles of racism.
- The undercapitalization of black communities in Toronto, including large cultural festivals like Caribana.

Solutions Proposed

Broadly, the consensus was that the government needs to prepare a detailed action plan down to dollars and cents. A mandate to try and to collaborate was not seen as sufficient. Many agreed that for anti-racism to succeed dollars must be committed and a detailed action plan must be created. Many community members who spoke used their platform to share their concerns and to hold the government officials present accountable. However, the following were amongst the solutions proposed:

- Educational reform that introduces anti-racism to children at a young age in an effort to curtail the development of racist beliefs.
- Police system reform that introduces greater accountability and transparency. Currently, the view is that police officers may hide behind the anonymity created by their badge. The community does not want this to continue.
- Prison system reform that is aimed at preserving the human rights of all prisoners and putting an end to the cycle of disproportionate minority incarceration.
- The rigorous collection of race-based data in prisons, the welfare system, the healthcare system, the private sector, etc.
- More funding for mental health, child welfare, and legal services aimed directly at the black community as opposed to the community at large.

BLSA Canada's Perspective

While the formation of the Anti-Racism Directorate is a positive step, the first meeting made it apparent that the onus is on the community to ensure that the directorate delivers. Not only must the directorate propose firm solutions, it must craft these solutions in large part from the consultations it receives from black Canadians. The directorate, as it stands now, is in fact lacking in tangible offerings and commitments. However, it is also new and it also has articulated a respectable commitment to anti-racism. Organizations such as Black Lives Matter and BLSAC must contribute in applying the pressure needed to transform these commitments into actions. Further, the offerings of the community must continue to include firm solutions that the directorate should champion or be held to account for neglecting.